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Conducted by  
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**“Would you please explain what it is meant by Paul in 1 Cor. 5:5 when he says, ‘to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord’**

This verse can only be explained adequately by referring it to the context in which it occurs. Some commentators have entitled 1 Cor. 5 almost like a detective novel by calling it, “The Case of the Incestuous Brother”, and have either stated or implied that the person concerned was guilty of having had sexual intercourse with his own mother; the text of 1 Cor. 5, however, does not support this interpretation, nor would a dictionary definition of incest. I have said that the context will help to explain the main question, so let us start there.

#### THE CONTEXT

Paul says, **“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you”** (v1). The word commonly (A. V.) means literally ‘actually’ (R. V.). Reported means literally **“it is heard”**. So the start of v1 could read, **“Fornication is actually heard of among you”**. Possibly this sad news had come from the house of Chloe, for in 1 Cor. 1:11 we read, **“For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you”**. The Greek word for fornication is PORNEIA and may be defined as, “illicit sexual intercourse”. The sexual intercourse being spoken of was evidently of such a revolting character that it wasn’t even named among the Gentiles (the nations). Isn’t it sad that these Corinthians, ostensibly trying to convert the nations to Christ, should be practising sins which people of the nations would not even practise. Small wonder that Paul was in an abrasive mood.

The nature of the sin was, **“that one should have his father’s wife”**. As I have indicated, this does not necessarily mean that the woman was the man’s mother, nor are we told whether or not the father was dead or divorced, but it would seem that the union of the man and the woman was of a permanent nature. It is interesting to note that the Jewish law was quite explicit concerning such a sin. In Lev. 18:8 we read, **“The nakedness of thy father’s wife shalt thou not uncover: it is the father’s nakedness”**. Again in Duet. 22:30, **“A man shall not take his father’s wife, nor discover his father’s skirt”**. In his second letter to Thessalonica Paul demanded withdrawal from such an offender (See 2 Thess. 3:6). It was disorderly conduct.

The attitude of some of the Corinthian brethren seems to have deeply offended the Apostle for, he says, **“ye are puffed up”**. Several times in this letter he refers to those who adopted this attitude (See 4:6, 19, 20), and he seems to find it hard to believe that this inflated pride could actually condone the sin of the one who was acting despicably. The very least they could have done was to have mourned because of his sin, and to have seen to it that he was expelled from the community of believers so that a good example could have been given to those both inside and outside the Church. Remember, the Corinth of Paul’s day was a very immoral city, and for the Church to be seen to be condoning heinous sin was bound to have a very serious backlash against the Gospel. The saints in the Corinthian church should have felt no inflated pride in the man’s sin.

Although Paul was absent in body from them, he tells them that he has made an apostolic judgement in the case as though he were present with them. He makes the point that he **was**, in fact, present with them **in spirit**, and this is a perfectly valid point for him to make because he, along with them, was a brother in Christ. He makes them understand that their inflated pride should not make them believe that they were masters of their own destiny; by extension this is a good lesson for all Christians. When we meet together, we meet in the name, and under the authority, of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christians bring shame upon themselves, then they automatically bring shame on the One who died to save them. If we **glory** in our sin, then surely we compound the agony of the One who died to relieve us from sin. The message that Paul sent to Corinth was that the heinous sin which they were condoning could not be tolerated in the presence of the Holy One of God. His apostolic judgement had been made. The offender should be expelled from the community of believers. What did this mean in the longer term?

#### TO DELIVER TO SATAN

This is the main thrust of our young sister's question. Paul's judgement to the church at Corinth was that they should **"deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh"**.

The phrase **'deliver such an one unto Satan'**, is not new so far as Paul is concerned. You may recall that he used the same sort of condemnation against Hymenaeus and Alexander (See 1 Tim. 120). Of them he said, **"whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme"**. It is quite clear that in 1 Cor. 5 and 1 Tim. 1:20 that Paul certainly means expulsion from the church. We must not, however, think or infer that by putting the offenders out of the church, Paul is consigning them to eternal damnation. When he wrote his second letter to Thessalonica he said, **"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"**. (2 Thess. 3:14,15). Perhaps the greatest difficulty for a church to exercise discipline by expulsion from the fellowship is that such an action tends to induce hatred, either passive or active. In the case of an **enemy** it would be **active** hatred, and this is probably why Paul says that the erring brother must not be treated as an enemy.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the offender is to be **'delivered to Satan'** for a very specific purpose, i.e., **"for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord"**. The punishment – drastic though it is – is intended to be **remedial**. The sins – such as fornication, disobedience, consciences seared as with hot iron, blasphemy, love of the world instead of love for Christ – these must be renounced and remedied so far as the erring Christian is concerned: they must be destroyed. They are, if I can coin a phrase, **'thorns in the spirit'**. The **inward** remedial struggle to destroy the fleshly desires, which once they have complete control, can only result in spiritual death, can be extremely painful **in the flesh**. It is an undeniable fact that fleshly excesses can, in many cases, be the cause of bodily illnesses, quite apart from the trauma of the mind. I recall that in my early twenties I was smoking some 40 cigarettes a day. I realised that I was not my own master, and that I was, to a large extent, under the influence of nicotine. I determined that I had to stop smoking, and I did, but I was so beside myself for two or three months that I wasn't really fit to live with. It makes sense to destroy the excesses of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. We must never allow **our** faith to be shipwrecked because of the lusts of the flesh, and the destruction of our consciences; remember Hymenaeus and Alexander.

Brethren, we must always remember that no matter how delightful the excesses of the flesh may seem, our goal is the final salvation from sin in the day of the Lord. The

message for the Church is that we shall not achieve this desirable goal by condoning sin.

### THE PERVASIVE POWER

To complete the picture, Paul tells the Corinthian saints that to glory in the man's sin is not good; "**Do you not know that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump**"? Such is the pervasive power of leaven, that only a **little** of it can affect the whole lump (mixture). Isn't this like the effect of small germs spreading disease throughout the body? Some Christians seem to think that what they call **little sins** can be tolerated in the Church, but beware, the whole Church could soon be affected; such is the pervasive power of sin. It has to be purged out before it is too late.

There is, however, a positive side to all this. Even if the remedial action fails, there is, after the purging, a new lump, unleavened. This new lump would then be in the ideal and normal state of Christians, uncontaminated. No wickedness, no malice, says Paul, but exhibiting the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. This is surely what the Church should be like, and we should ask ourselves, "Why should it **not** be like this, with Christ as its Head? It is the task of us all to keep it pure and unadulterated.

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## THE NEED OF PATIENCE

Be patient, be still. In this day and age in which we live it might be with difficulty that we pay heed to this. Nevertheless we are exhorted to do just that (read Romans 15:5,6). Patience is indeed a fruit of the Spirit and consequently we must endeavour to develop and encourage it, both in self and others. Never forget the source, it comes of God. When we lack patience in full or part, it is the soul that suffers. Our spiritual welfare could well be on the decline! Take care! In the reading we are exhorted to be 'like-minded' one toward another. We have to be **patient**, likewise, one toward another. Practise the art of being patient, it works wonders. Christian love, Christian patience, Christian humility, Christian fellowship go hand in hand, all to the benefit of the soul.

In Christ all things are possible, patience included. When we meet the awkward brother, person, friend remember the source of patience. We are to live as one in fellowship with Christ, for a special reason: that we might with one mind and one voice **glorify God**. Patience, humility and love are essential to the well-being of the Christian. Develop, develop and develop, the art of being patient. Christ is the greatest example of patience (Isa. 53:7; Acts 8:32; Mat. 27).

We see Jesus on his way to the cross, knowing full well the outcome, yet He was patient, and humble, to the will of God.

We are in the race of life. We as Christians must exercise patience with greater care (read Hebrews 12:1). Patience they say is a **virtue**, to the Christian this is indeed true. In patience we may experience more of God's love.

Heb. 6-12 "**Be not slothful but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**"

We notice, an inheritance through faith and patience. The stronger the both, the greater the possibility of the inheritance. A promise of God.

Heb. 10:12 "**Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God. ye might receive the promise.**"

A promise for the Christian and the family of God. Be patient, but active glorifying God, as He would have us. We have need of patience.

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